

Entr'acte

The Opera
Supers of
Iowa City
Newsletter

Volume IV, Number 2

November 1988

Editor: Arthur Canter, 30 Brookfield Dr., Iowa City, IA 52245

Letter from the Editor

At long last the newsletter has a name, *Entr'acte*, which befits its function to provide news (music) between meetings of the Opera Supers and presentations by the University Opera Theater. It took more than three years before your editor felt the newsletter had earned a specific title. The usual practice is for the organization deciding on a newsletter to come up with the title first and then publish. But then, we are not the usual organization.

For the new reader: The Opera Supers of Iowa City is a group of persons dedicated to the support of the activities of The University of Iowa Opera Theater and the performances offered by the School of Music. Through its informal structure the group creates opportunities to share interests, ideas and experiences in things operatic as well as in music in general. What the Supers actually do best is described by the material included in *Entr'acte* such as the announcements, reports of meetings, and notices. It is suggested that you save copies of the newsletter in a separate folder if you are not already doing so. Thus, you will not only have a running account of our activities but also a collection of essays, operatic history, anecdotes, biographical sketches of composers, background data of specific operas, commentaries, and trivia.

October 18 Meeting Report

Despite competition from many distractions, we had a good turnout of sixteen Supers.

Calendars for Music School events for the rest of the semester were handed out. Hope Solomons reported on a gift of costumes that is to be made to the Opera Theater by someone who had an association with the University a number of years back. Joan Falconer reported on the

need for volunteers to help in preparing materials for use in the Music Library. (See her notice elsewhere in this issue of *Entr'acte*). The reception held by the Supers for the University Symphony Orchestra and new faculty following the orchestra's last concert was a great success and well received. Thanks are expressed to all the Supers who provided foods and services for that event. It is noted that every Super who earlier had promised something for the reception came through—loyalty and devotion! Plans were made for a reception for the "one-actors" (this year Viennese operetta scenes) performance on Saturday, November 19. Professor Glass reported on the performance of *Lucia di Lammermoor* he staged for the Salt Lake City Opera. The group was reminded about the Cedar Rapids Symphony Orchestra concert of *Fidelio* scheduled for March 1989. The Supers may want to attend as a group as they did for the CRSO *Magic Flute* two years ago. The December meeting of the Supers will most likely feature some arias sung by Kimm Julian. Details are to be worked out. The January meeting of the Supers will be on Monday, the 16th.

Operetta, Notes and Reflections

The scheduled presentations of Viennese operetta excerpts on November 19 and 20, by the students of the University Opera theater provide this opportunity for a brief look-see into the genre. It has been noted that many opera fanciers who consider themselves *true* opera lovers tend to downgrade operetta as being somewhat inferior to opera, not only in terms of the supposed triviality of libretti but also in the "cream puff" nature of the music. This attitude prevails even though those who harbor it admit to enjoying operetta. Exceptions are made for *Fledermaus* and *The Merry Widow*, as both are often

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(Opera Notes, cont.)

included in the repertory of major opera houses.

When the history of operetta is investigated, all sorts of interesting reactions throughout the development of this type of musical theater come to be revealed. There are differences in opinion as to what constitutes *operetta* as distinct from *light opera*, *opera-comique*, *opera buffa*, and even grand opera itself. There is not the space nor the time to provide you with a concise history. To those interested I refer you to Richard Traubner's *Operetta; A Theatrical History* (1984). A copy of the book may be found in the Rita Benton Music Library. It was a recent selection of the Performing Arts Book Club. In his introduction to the book, Traubner wrote: "Let me stand up and say that the best operettas are in many ways more intelligent, entertaining, and musically stimulating than some of the operas currently on the stage today, not to mention those bores lurking in the wings, like those dredged up by *bel canto* aficionados.... *Die Fledermaus* is as great a masterpiece in its genre as *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* is in its. Why must we constantly pit one against the other and try to decide which is more culturally important. Let's enjoy both!"

I echo the sentiment. The antecedents to the snobbish attitudes toward operetta may be found in the different paths of development for the two forms of musical theater. Opera developed out of the aristocratic court-owned theaters, while operetta arose out of performances taking place in theaters for the populace. In any case, while operetta may have had a number of different traceable ancestors in its origins, it seems to have been conceived in France. Credit for parentage is given to Hervé, (Florimond Ronger, 1825-1892), and Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880). The former is little remembered today while the work of the latter is well-known. The popularity of Offenbach operettas in France and all of Europe in the mid to late 1800s cannot be overstated. Most non-French operettas heard today are based on the French models of the 1850s developed by Offenbach and his librettists Henri Meilhac (1831-1897) and Ludovic Halévy (1834-1908). The latter, by the way, was the nephew of Jacques Halévy, composer of *La Juive*.

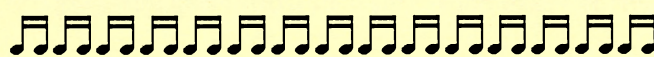
Viennese operetta evolved out the Offenbach-Meilhac-Halévy mold and reached its zenith with compositions of Johann Strauss II, the great waltz king. The University Opera Theater

will present excerpts from three of his works: *Der Zigeuner Baron*, *Wiener Blut*, and *Die Fledermaus*. The basis for *Fledermaus* was the three-act comedy *Le Réveillon* by Meilhac and Halévy. The popularity of *Die Fledermaus* has never diminished and remains in the repertory of the Met, Covent Garden, and New York City Opera, among others. I remember being unable to get a ticket to see *Rosalinda*, as it was called during World War II, in London in 1944 because the performances were all sold out weeks in advance, war or no war.

Other works to be performed by the University Opera Theater include excerpts from Heuberger's *Der Opernball*, Zeller's *Der Vogelhändler* and Lehar's incomparable *Die lustige Witwe* (*The Merry Widow*.)

Richard Heuberger (1850-1914) was, among other things, a prominent music critic for newspapers in Vienna and Munich. Carl Zeller (1842-1898), after his music training, went into civil service, reaching high prominence in the Austrian government bureau of arts and education. *Der Vogelhändler* became as popular in Germany as in Austria because of its setting in the Rhine Palatinate although the story is modeled on Tyrolean folk. Apparently there were actual Papageno types of birdsellers in the Tyrol of Austria. Franz Lehar (1870-1947) ushered in the so-called silver period of Viennese operetta. His greatest work, *The Merry Widow* (1905), "was the beginning of a new wave of modern operettas in which the waltz was used for romantic psychological plot purposes and danced as much as sung."—Traubner.

The Merry Widow has been staged here in Hancher, it has been on T.V., and it has been made into movies. It rivals *Die Fledermaus* in popularity today. But there are other Lehar operettas that have been widely performed in the recent past. In particular, I think those associated with Richard Tauber, the tenor for whom Lehar wrote some of his works. I have fond memories of Tauber, especially of one of his last appearances in New York (1946) in *The Land of Smiles*. It's too bad one of our student tenors will not offer "Dein is mein ganzes Herz" from that operetta, but I am sure whatever is sung from *The Merry Widow* will be well received.



Volunteers needed for the Music Library

Do you like to sew? Joan Falconer, head of the Rita Benton Music Library would like you to render a vital service to the library by assisting with handbinding. Thanks in part to the many gifts received from former faculty member John Simms and Himie Voxman, director of the School 1954-1980, there is a large backlog of music scores and parts that needs to be sewn into binders. Under the newly constituted University Libraries Volunteer Program, the Music Library is being encouraged to seek help for this project.

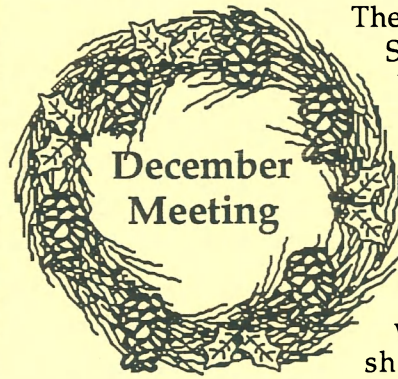
The Music Library would like to have two people who are handy at sewing and would commit from two to four hours a week. They should be able to read music enough to recognize where a piece begins and ends, since some instrumental parts have odd pagings.

Hours will be arranged to mesh with library staff schedules (Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.) and to ensure that an experienced person is always available for consultation. The two volunteers would be encouraged to work together, if they so desired. There will be a trial period of one month, followed by a mutual evaluation. The duration of the project is one semester, with the possibility of extension or resumption, depending on the backlog. The volunteers will be considered part of the Music Library "family," entitled to participate in parties and potlucks!

If you are interested, please call William C. Sayre, Assistant University Librarian for Administrative Services (335-5867), to arrange for an interview. If you would like more information, you may call Joan Falconer at 335-3086 or drop by the Music Library during any weekday. (If you know of someone not on the Supers list or who hasn't access to the newsletter but who may like to volunteer for this project, please pass the word.—Ed.)

Calendar of Events

The School of Music now provides a printed Fall Semester Calendar of Events which lists the major events sponsored by the School. A similar calendar will be printed for the Spring term. If you have not received one of these calendars and would like one, please contact Mona Shaw (335-1667).



The December Opera Supers meeting will be held at the home of Linda and Doug Behrendt, 822 Park Road on Tuesday, December 13 at 7:30 p.m. The business meeting will be followed by a short program presented by Kimm Julian

and will include an hors d'oeuvre/dessert potluck. Because of limited seating space, you must R.S.V.P. no later than December 9 by calling Mona Shaw (335-1667) or Linda Behrendt (337-5342).

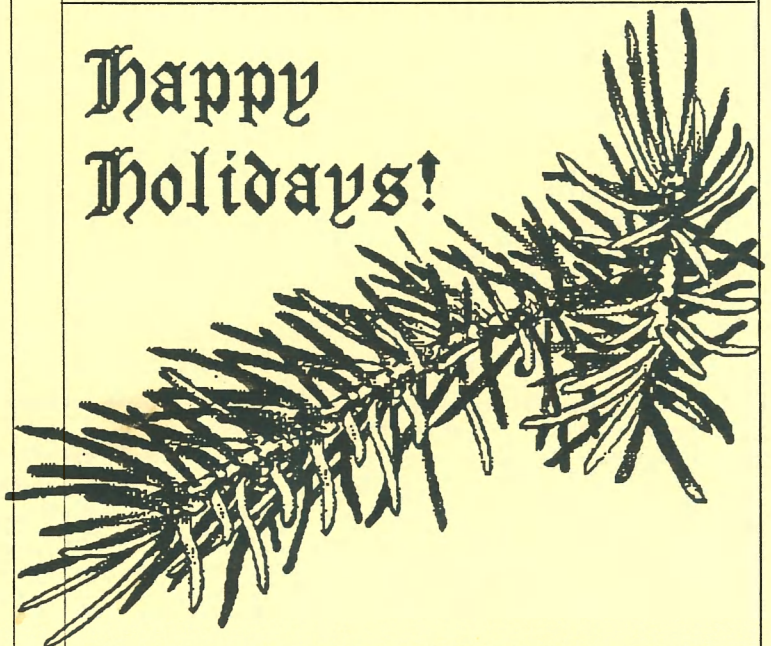
Viennese Operetta Scenes & Reception

Viennese Operetta Scenes directed by Beaumont Glass will be Saturday and Sunday, November 19 and 20 at 8:00 p.m. in the Opera Studio. Opera Supers are invited to a reception following the Saturday evening performance in the lounge (room 1028) of the Music Building. To volunteer or for more information about the reception, call Miriam Canter, 338-1217.

January Meeting

The January Meeting of Opera Supers of Iowa City will be Monday, January 16, 1989 at 7:00 p.m. in the lounge of the Music Building. We will discuss projects for the spring opera, *Carmen*.

Happy
Holidays!



Important Numbers

Arthur Canter, newsletter, 338-1217

Miriam Canter, hospitality, 338-1217

Shirley Harrison, costumes, 337-5729

Mary Wall, scenery, 338-2618

Marilyn Somville, Director of the School of Music, 335-1601

Beaumont Glass, Director of Opera Theater, 335-1669

Mona Shaw, Public Relations Coordinator, 335-1667

Dwight Sump, Opera Production Manager, 335-1153

Margaret Wenk, Opera Designer, 335-2988

The University of Iowa
School of Music
Iowa City, Iowa 52242

